

CENTENARY EVANGELISM

IN

WEST CHINA

A composite report of Evangelistic Campaigns held in two walled cities where tens of thousands heard the Good News and where over a hundred thousand tracts and Christian books were distributed.

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Accepting God's "Kingdom plan" of "First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear, then the harvest" as a basis of all our plans, we fix our faith upon the realization of a province-wide harvest thru the power of God in His Holy Spirit. Altho yet in the experimental stage, it is hoped to so organize the movement as to assure its ready interrelation with all similar efforts elsewhere; to emphasize such essential doctrines as shall enable it either to incorporate or to be incorporated into, any fraternal evangelistic movement of the Church of Christ; to conduct its progress in such accord with the highest apologetic principles as shall insure the corporation of all such indigenous organizations as have for their object the up-lifting of the people of China who are under their jurisdiction; and to so conserve and utilize all spiritual force and energy generated in each single campaign as to admit of no early reaction, but on the contrary to increase the momentum.

The general preparation for the evangelistic meetings which we have just held in West China began four years ago when several preachers were gathered together and special meetings were held in some of the larger towns and villages. During the last four years a dozen or more such meetings have been conducted and in these experience has been gained and our men are being trained into an effective band of workers, so much so that during the months of March and April of this year we were enabled to put on two city evangelistic campaigns.

Centenary

Special preparation for these meetings was in progress for two years. Committees had been organized, and more especially an institute for the training of Class Leaders, who would have in hand the matter of caring for possible converts. This policy follows the tested plan of our church which provides for a weekly meeting of classes, instruction in Scripture and doctrine, personal expression, mutual help, friendly supervision and encouragement, with quarterly reports by the leader to the Pastor.

The corps of workers consisted of twenty of our strongest and best prepared Chinese preachers, together with some enthusiastic Church members who afforded good assistance in tract distribution, ushering, etc.; several Bible women; three lady missionaries; and from three to six men missionaries, including one physician.

Recognizing the important facts that man is body as well as soul and that attention can be secured only thru interest, certain important necessities were foreseen and provided; first, readily accessible places of meeting including a Confucian temple court protected from sun and rain by a canopy of five thousand square feet of canvas and lighted at night by hanging lamps, with forms sufficient to seat about one thousand people; and second, a nearby church building available for workers' councils at certain hours and for women's meetings; third, the school house nearby where children were gathered each day; fourth, dispensary; fifth, three street chapels in strategic places; and sixth, Bible and literature distributing center.

The program of the day was as follows: After an early morning lesson for the workers, led by the veteran missionary, Dr. Spencer Lewis, whose messages were always helpful and inspiring, the workers would separate into different bands and go to their respective places of work: street chapel preachers; book and tract distributors; women's work; children's work; and medical work. Shortly after noon all would come together reporting on the morning's work after which some time would be spent in prayer and praise. These daily reports from the different groups were most encouraging. Scarcely ever had the men or women found such attentive audiences, so many enquiries about the gospel message and so little opposition. The afternoons would be spent in work similar to that of the mornings, in preparation for other meetings and attending lectures. These lectures were given in the large tent, some by our preachers and others by local talent. Among the latter

we had excellent and helpful lectures by the City Magistrates of both cities and by leading educationalists dealing with such subjects as, "Christianity a Help to Law Enforcement," "The Five Great Religions," "The Efficient Life," etc. In every case the tone and tendency were most favorable to Christianity. After one of the lectures a call was made on the City Magistrate and in the conversation about his lecture he said, "We can't govern this country without you people. We need the church to back us up. Without the church ours would be an impossible task."

We rented three extra street chapels in important places which were manned by from four to eight workers a day. Men would sit for two hours here listening to a relay of preachers as they explained the way of salvation. Preachers, when acting as ushers for the different meetings were often invited to a nearby tea shop to answer enquiries regarding the message being presented. Here too the evening meetings were well advertized and interest was stimulated with the result that the attendance was all that could be desired. At each of these places was a stall for the selling of tracts which added greatly to the attraction of the services.

The importance of book and tract distribution cannot well be over estimated. Several men were employed to post tracts and posters all over the city, especially in public places such as barber shops, tea shops, inns and conspicuous points at the bends of streets and lanes. Those principally used were the large sheet texts having red and black characters on a white background, making a striking appeal to the eye, especially in a Chinese city where such posters are unknown, and, literally "He who runs may read." On the main streets there were book shops, loaned by the local merchants. One of these shops was owned by a cloth merchant who removed his stock of cloth to an inner court yard and cleared the shop entirely for our use for the duration of the meeting.

The books on sale at these places were gospel portions, tracts and other Christian literature. Aside from the work carried on in the street chapels and regular book shops men and voluntary bands of boys went out into the streets and even outside the city selling books. One missionary sold two hundred gospels in two hours. These book distributors also had an opportunity to urge people to attend the tent meetings at night. Frequently people were seen at the tent who had been thus invited. So many gospel portions and other books were sold that a person meeting the crowds leaving the city in the evening after a market day would see a gospel or other

Christian literature in the hands of practically every person. As three market days occurred during each campaign thousands of people from the surrounding country and nearby towns were afforded an opportunity of coming into direct contact with the gospel. The distributors were always full of enthusiasm for the simple reason that every one wanted their tracts. So great was the demand that a messenger was sent twenty-five miles to the nearest telegraph station to wire to headquarters for two more coolie loads of books.

The printed matter thus scattered will serve to keep in mind the spoken word, and to help carry on the work of the evangelistic campaign.

Special work among women at these campaigns was a new venture. On account of the lack of proper places for meetings nothing had been attempted along these lines at the preceding smaller campaigns, consequently the missionary and her corps of Bible women had not the experience and training that had been afforded the men. A program was made out, the work being so arranged that each worker knew her duty for the day. Two attended the dispensary each forenoon and spoke to the women patients. One had charge of the selling and distribution of gospel portions and tracts at each meeting. Altho practically none of the women can read they received the free literature gladly and would often buy the gospel portions saying that they would get some one to read for them. Other workers were appointed to house-to-house visitation, to invite the women to the meetings, many of whom otherwise would not have come. The missionary with two Bible women spoke to the crowds every forenoon and afternoon. Often many came an hour or so before time for the meeting to begin. The hymn that had been printed for broadcast distribution and simple gospel tracts printed in large character were distributed among these early comers and the workers would teach them the characters. Practically every one, no matter how old or ignorant would make an attempt to learn. The prime object was not to teach the character but it gave an opportunity for individual teaching and explanation of the truth that one does not have in speaking to a crowd. This personal contact is most valuable. Many of the crowd would often sit three hours listening attentively to the old, old story of Christ's love told in turn with much earnestness by the missionary and her faithful helpers.

Even when the meetings were over many would remain just as long as any one would talk to them. Often they would have to be



EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN WORKERS



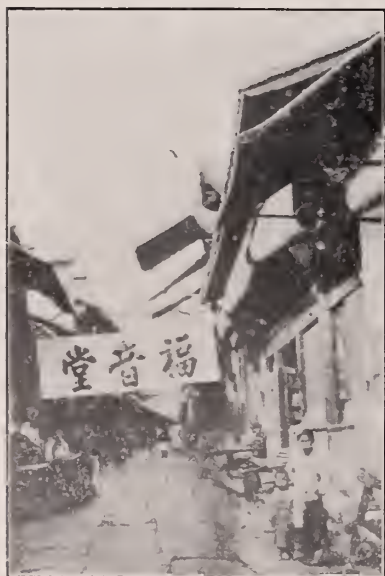
CONGREGATION OF MEN IN TENT



MR. LIN



CITY MAGISTRATE LIU OF PISHAN



ONE OF THE TEMPORARY
STREET CHAPELS



WOMEN AND CHILDREN LEAVING
CHURCH AT NOON

invited to go home with a cordial invitation to the next meeting, in order that the workers might have time for their meals. Many came to every meeting and one grew familiar with certain faces and it was gratifying to feel that they were interested enough to thus leave their household duties day after day in order to hear the gospel. While we realize that with many it was only idle curiosity—often the organ and foreign ladies seemed more interesting than the message—yet those who had the privilege of coming into close contact day after day with those poor hungry souls found in many of them a real longing for something that all their religious vows, fastings, and idol worship had not satisfied.

As one looked upon the crowds day after day, oft times so restless and curious, and seeming so unconscious of their soul's need, how often did the words of the Master come to one, "And He beholding the Multitude had compassion upon them for they were as sheep having no shepherd."

There is a question as to the practicability of this plan for work among women as it is difficult to deal with them in crowds, but the interest among the women in each of the places where these campaigns were held has been stimulated. At one of the places the Sunday following the close of the campaign there was not standing room on the side of the church reserved for women. It is believed that with proper follow-up-work, such as the organization of station classes where all interested could be gathered in as soon as the campaign ended and taught the character and simple gospel truths—that many of these women could be brought into the fold.

The children literally swarmed to their meetings which were held every morning and afternoon. Since there is no compulsory education in China and the streets are filled with children who receive no teaching whatever, it was considered a great treat by them to get even the bit of training and attention which could be given them in such a short time and under such crowded conditions. All sizes came even to the babies strapped on the backs of older sisters. All sat quietly and eagerly attentive while gospel stories were told with vim and ability. The stories were reviewed later and it was interesting to note how remarkably well they were remembered by the children. Simple hymns and motion songs were taught which were especially enjoyed. The keen interest and enjoyment shown in all the activities more than repaid any effort expended upon them. One could not but feel that the result of the

work gave but a glimpse of what might be done in a longer time and with better equipment.

The medical work was certainly a great help to the larger cause of evangelism. Hundreds came daily to receive relief from their bodily pains. Women patients were treated in the mornings and the men in the afternoons. At all times there were helpers preaching the gospel to those awaiting their turns for treatment. "Nature is kind" is a quaint remark that an old professor of surgery used to like to use and one often thinks this must be the secret of the survival of such a large population in China. Nothing that will give every disease a full opportunity to be transmitted is neglected. It was a privilege to speak on public and personal hygiene to several hundreds. Perhaps a few got a little inspiration to make it a bit less easy for disease to have its own way everywhere. Foreign medicine is beginning to have a large following but the mass of the people still have to depend on the dirty and dangerous medical practice of forty centuries. The experiences of itinerant dispensers of medicines impress one with the need for more work of this nature. We have a large number of church members in the rural sections, to whom an occasional visit from the medical missionary would be a great blessing and often a life-saver. One cannot help but notice the great prevalence of eye diseases. How like the experiences of our Lord! Those who walk in dimness of vision could nearly all have been cured had they received medical attention at the right time; but they need also to know the need voiced in our hymn, "Oh take the dimness of my soul away," and so we are glad to preach to them the Christ and Him crucified for us all. Over a thousand heard the gospel preached in the dispensary waiting rooms and many got a glimpse of the Light of the World that lighteth every man as well as some help for their physical vision. To do this work as it should be done, we are looking anxiously toward America for the men and resources which are needed to make this last great crusade under the banner of the Cross.

The daily program culminated in the enthusiastic meetings held each night in the court of one of the great temples of the city. At Jungchang we were loaned the Confucian temple formerly regarded as sacred to only the great Sage. Here before the Confucian tablets the Christian preacher proclaimed night after night the unsearchable riches of Christ. The temple-court being a hollow square, as are all temple courts in West China, a ridge pole was erected and over this a canopy of five thousand square feet of canvas was stretched which served as a protection from sun and rain and

also provided a most excellent auditorium. Forms were furnished by the local gentry sufficient to seat about one thousand people. Every night the tent would be crowded and practically all would remain thru the entire service. The meeting opened with a song service at which only one hymn was sung but what a hymn! It was especially prepared for the meetings containing in four verses the main points of the gospel: God the Father; man the sinner; Christ the Redeemer; and salvation thru faith. This was printed on cheap paper for broadcast distribution each evening and was sung to the tune of "Kentucky" which is particularly liked by the people having a decided Chinese swing to it. The singing was led by an organ and cornet. At first there was some hesitation when the great crowd was asked to sing but by the third evening they got under way and by the fifth evening they could be heard half a mile! On two evenings the cornetist took a crowd of boys from the congregation and went down to the public square where he started up the tune, the boys singing it all the way back to the temple court. What a crowd we did get! Our attempt was to sing the gospel right into the hearts of the people and in this we feel that we were very largely successful.

The speaker at these evening meetings followed a constructive plan showing the responsibility of man as a member of society; how he is degraded by following his own inclinations; fallen into sin; and can only be extricated by a higher power, even Christ Jesus. Then in relation to the gospel he may become a real constructive member of society, helping to establish the Kingdom here and now. At the last meeting "A Christian Program" was outlined. Not only were the crowds large but the leading men of the cities attended time and again. The quietness of the great congregation and their strict attention to the messages was remarked over and over again.

A reasonably careful summary gave us an estimate that our different congregations for the sixteen days aggregated thirty thousand people. During these sixteen days the gospel, the gospel hall, and the great meetings were the chief topics of conversation among the people of the cities as well as visitors. The public acknowledgment of the practical worth of Christianity by local authorities was gained, while ordinary people were overheard testifying, "More people go to the Gospel meetings than go to theatres" and the reply, "Yes, and see what good order they keep." The Chinese are conservative and are not easily stampeded. In our smaller meetings formerly held practically no new enquirers were

found till the very close of the meetings, or in some cases not until the next few months; but in every case the very great change in the life of the church dates from the time of its evangelistic campaign. On the other hand in our late city campaigns over two hundred men and women signed up expressing their desire to study and to know more of the way of life. Thus we are encouraged to believe that the Lord is pleased to use this method of special evangelism for His church now and here in West China. The local church membership in each city is enthusiastic about conserving the results of the meetings and we are very hopeful for the future.

When we remember that practically two years of work was contributed, that one hundred and twenty thousand books and tracts were distributed and that thirty Chinese and nine foreign workers were especially blessed in service and made more efficient in training, we can appreciate to some degree what a time of seed sowing and harvest these campaigns were.

Our West China field is peculiarly ripe for such meetings as we have just held and if a force could be had so that our entire field could be swept over during the next ten years, what marvels might be wrought for the Master!